ForeWord Reviews

SPORTS & RECREATION

Blood: Stories of Life and Death from the Civil War
Art Davidson
Greg Child
Jon Krakauer
Stephen Venables
Clint Willis, editor
Rick Adamson, narrator
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“This upper part of Everest must be indeed the remotest and least hospitable spot on earth, but at no time more emphatically and impressive so than when a darkened atmosphere hides its features and a gale races over its face.” These are the words of the climber Noel Odell, written in 1924 as he searched the icy peak for his missing companions George Mallory and Andrew Irvine. He never found them.

The tale of Mallory’s disappearance on Mount Everest is related in an excerpt from The Lost Explorer by Conrad Anker and David Roberts, and it’s just one of the ripping good adventure stories in Adrenaline 2000. Sort of a Best American Essays with a death wish, this book takes readers from the tops of snow-capped mountains to the depths of shark-filled seas in all corners of the map, and points unmapped, where humankind travels to pit itself against nature for thrills.

The book's thirteen stories are collected from sources as diverse as National Geographic, The New York Times Magazine, Outside magazine and Salon.com. Some center on humanity's need to seek contact with animals, such as Pulitzer Prize-winning author Philip Caputo's travels across the plains of Kenya searching for man-eating lions; explorer Reinhold Messner's trek deep into Tibet that left him face to face with a creature that just might have been the legendary yeti; and nature writer Sy Montgomery's journey of self-discovery to see the pink dolphins of the Amazon. Others are about finding and facing the harshest landscapes on the planet: Mark Jenkins' treacherous climb through a blizzard on the Matterhorn; Michael Finkel's nearly suicidal snowboarding trip to Alaska's Chugach Mountains; Rolf Potts' walk deep into the Libyan Desert.

The most compelling moments in these stories come when the writers reach the point of conquering their fears, as in this passage where Bill Belleville describes his swim among sharks:

> *Around me, the bubbles become domes of mercury and drift up to the surface… The environment seems to absorb me. I become one with it. And then something magical happens. I see the sharks more clearly. Gill slits, eyes and mouths come into focus. The grace of their swimming awes me… Instead of mindless eating machines, they become elegant, smooth-skinned beasts; giant, underwater panthers. I begin to admire them.*

What the stories all share is the core question: Why? Why do humans need to test themselves against nature? Why this perpetual quest for danger? There are as many answers as there are adventurers, but the truth each of the stories in Adrenaline 2000 eventually uncovers is a simple one: The adventure is its own reward.

Amorak Huey